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## FIND A REPUTABLE LOCKSMITH BEFORE YOU NEED ONE

If you've ever locked yourself out of your car or home, you know what a mission it can be. Your first thought is to call a family member in hopes that they have a spare set of keys. But what if that isn't an option, and the only way into your home or car is through a locksmith? Do you know which locksmith to call? Do you know if he or she is reputable?

The Associated Locksmiths of America reports that the prevalence of fraudulent locksmiths is a scam that is only growing. Many unscrupulous individuals are manipulating phone book and internet listings with multiple false addresses and phone numbers. In reality, consumers are calling out-of-state operations that are not locksmith companies. They are out-of-state operations that dispatch the calls to local contractors. This is how the scam works. The consumer is quoted a reasonable price over the phone, but when a person posing as a locksmith finishes the job, the consumer is charged a considerable amount more for unnecessary and/or sub-standard work.

The complaint heard most often by consumers is for car openings. The price quoted over the phone to stranded motorist is different than the one charged after the work is complete. This unscrupulous individual tells the frustrated consumer that the initial price was just the service call and that it was another \$90 - \$100 for servicing the lock. These out-of-state operations are set up solely to make money by purposely defrauding the public.

Miami-Dade County requires all locksmith companies and individual locksmiths who provide services to the public to be registered and licensed by the Consumer Protection Unit of the Business Affairs Division. Licenses are only granted to individuals who undergo and pass a criminal background check. Locksmiths and locksmith companies are required to have insurance, and to have proper identification from the department before performing any of these services.

The Associated Locksmiths of America has a website where you can find qualified locksmiths in your area who are members of the association. The website is [www.findalocksmith.com](http://www.findalocksmith.com). In addition, you can call the County's Consumer Protection Unit at 305-375-3677 to verify that you are dealing with a registered locksmith. Furthermore, there are certain precautionary steps that you can take to ensure that you don't get locked out of luck.

- Ask friends and family for referrals
- When the locksmith arrives, ask to see identification and a copy of his locksmith license
- Get a written estimate before work begins
- Never sign a blank form

- If the locksmith's on-site price doesn't match the phone estimate, don't allow the work to be performed
- Miami-Dade County code requires locksmiths to have a clearly marked vehicle
- Miami-Dade County code requires locksmiths to display the registration number on all forms, invoices, advertisements, commercial trucks and vans.

For more consumer tips, or to check the complaint history of a company, file a complaint or ask consumer-related questions, visit the **Business Affairs Division** website at [www.miamidade.gov/business](http://www.miamidade.gov/business), or call (305) 375-3677.